

# MAJOR FEATURES, METHOD OF SELECTION, MARKETING AND EXPLOITATION OF SERIALS

A.W. K. INSAIDOO

*Serious Fraud Office, Accra-Ghana*

## ABSTRACT

The paper traces the historical development of serials in Europe, the Far East and Africa and how it has contributed to the wide spread of knowledge and information. It also highlights the impact of serials on the social, economic and political life in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century especially in generating the growth and the desire to acquire knowledge and skill.

The major features of serials, its method of selection, marketing and exploitation are analysed critically to serve as a guide for librarians, information scientists, and users. The paper affirms that effective and efficient management of serials is very necessary for intellectual and recreational pursuit.

## INTRODUCTION

Modern civilization owes its rapid development to invention of machines, development of social, political and economic structures and systems, technology, processes and communication. In the field of communication, the strides made in the development of writing and printing gave birth to the publishing industry. Publishing as a communication media enhanced the growth of knowledge, awareness and exchange of ideas between people from far and near. Publication of serials was,

later to be the hob upon which the acceleration, proliferation of information and knowledge to parts of the world revolved.

## HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

The term 'serial' simply defined is a publication, which is issued in successive parts at regular intervals, with a view to indefinite continuation. According to Evans<sup>1</sup> the American Library Association Directory defines serial thus; a publication issued in successive parts, usually at regular intervals, and as a rule intended to be continued indefinitely'. Serials include periodicals, annuals, report, yearbooks, proceedings and transactions of learned societies. In this paper, serials, periodicals, magazines and journals are used interchangeably.

Harvey<sup>2</sup> explained that the term 'serial' is usually accepted to include periodicals and also publications issued annually or less frequently, such as yearbooks, annual reports while periodicals include daily and weekly newspapers, scholarly journals, trade journals, magazines, and also indexing and abstracting journals. When these two definitions are fused together, the implication or the impression created is that serials is a generic term for publications issued in successive parts, numbered, have a title and issued at regu-

lar or irregular intervals with the view to indefinite continuation. Serials are very important source of printed information. Usually they carry the most current information about a topic, developments in various fields of human activity and a source of learning new things.

Records have it that there had been approaches to a magazine in antiquity, especially in China, Rome, Egypt etc. but the contemporary magazine developed after the invention of printing in the West. The earliest was probably in German *Erbauliche Monats-Underredungen* (1663-68). Other early ones were the Philosophical Transactions (1665) of the Royal Society of England, the French *Journal des Savants* (1665)<sup>3</sup>.

The rate of development of serials was given impetus by the increasing rate of literacy, the revival of learning, and the need to diffuse knowledge and experience as widely as possible. This trend encouraged publication of magazines and journals in Europe in the form of gazette, reviews, and weeklies. Few, however were devoted to women e.g. *Ladies Mercury* (1690-97) and the *Gentleman's Journal* (1662-94). In Russia the first periodical was published by the Academy of science i.e. *Monthly Works* (1755-1840?) and in the United States, the *American Magazine* (1741)<sup>4</sup>.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period that ushered in mass circulation periodicals and magazines some aimed at a wider public, stressed on improvement, enlightenment and family entertainment. In

other parts of the world, e.g. Australia, the *Australian Magazine* was registered. *The Sydney Literary News* (1837), the *Indian Oriental Magazine* (1785-86), the *Chinese Monthly Magazine* (1815-1822)<sup>5</sup> were all in vogue. During the early years of the century, some serials devoted their pages to critical reviews of social, political, religious and literary works while others serialized best fiction or standard test books.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some serial publications became the mouthpiece of societies, professional bodies, institutions, and religious groups. These publications had limited circulation e.g. the *National Geographic Magazine* (188), the *British Medical Journal* (1840). These developments were the resulting effects of the changing social, economic and political life in Europe. The publications also became an alternative forum for debate and exchange of ideas, views and comments on topical issues of special and general interest.

However some other factors that generated its influence were the exponential growth of information and the desire to acquire knowledge and skill, the proliferation of research activities in the universities and industries, the development and fragmentation of disciplines in academic institutions, the need to publish research findings, and the general development in communication and industrial technology.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, because of publish or perish dichotomy, publication productivity became the primary criteria for career advancement in many institutions."<sup>7</sup>

Currently there are two principal types

of periodicals, mainly reflecting the following pursuits:

1. Scientific and technical
2. Leisure and recreational<sup>8</sup>

Marle<sup>9</sup> maintains that periodicals form an important part in the acquisition budgets of Higher Education and University Libraries. For example in the EC Libraries, the estimated distribution of Revenue Expenditure in acquisitions (1981-85) - millions of ECU p. a - 79.2 (49%) as against 74.8 (47%) for books and 5.8 (4%) other. Periodical titles as at 1985 in the EC was 7,488,509 in 1981 and 7,574,451 in 1985.

## MAJOR FEATURES

Serials usually publish materials more quickly. A periodical article may allow scope for the full development of themes and subjects which would not be capable of expression to a book length.<sup>10</sup> Some materials later appear in book form but usually periodical articles are not published elsewhere. They are difficult to handle in large numbers and require a great deal of space for storage and display. Its multiplicity accordingly results in scattering of papers which makes it quite impossible for the scientist to keep informed of new developments, impossible for the librarians to cover a field adequately and for abstracting / indexing services to include all.<sup>11</sup>

Serials are basically paper back publications and may be characterized by some or all the following features:

1. Issue number, barcode, title, ISSN/EAN symbol, and frequency.

2. May contain scholarly articles, reviews, news items, illustrations, adverts, and graphics.
3. Editor / Editorial Board with international representation on it.
4. May be international in scope / general or special.
5. A bilingual publication with abstracts.
6. Usually published by a reputable publisher or press.
7. May be classified or indexed or enjoy abstracting services.
8. Issue index.
9. May be issued simultaneously in different languages e.g. publications by the United Nations, Canada and the Republic of Cameroon.
10. May be published in micro-forms / or available on-line.

Serials or periodicals are categorized into two groups i.e. primary and non-primary periodicals. Primary journals are said to exist for the dissemination and exchange of information between authors and readers and the provision of permanent records of research findings of learned societies, research associations, semi-official bodies, and professional bodies. Non-primary materials are produced for information, recreation, reporting current events or represent highly specialized or minority views e.g. for women, children, the blind, the immigrant, political parties, or religious groups. Non-primary periodicals are published commercially in anticipation of profit, and therefore seek adverts as major source of revenue.<sup>12</sup>

## METHODS OF SELECTION

As mentioned earlier in this paper, budget for serials in Higher Education Libraries, are normally apportioned a greater percentage of the total budget allocation because of its frequency and rising cost. I believe the situation might be the same in Research Libraries where the major Library materials are serials. Against this background Evans<sup>13</sup> contemplates that to subscribe or to place a standing order for a serial is a much bigger decision than for monograph, because of the long-term commitment and the rise in prices at a rate higher than many libraries can sustain. From this perception, it gives cause for concern and a critical analysis to be done when selecting serials for Libraries with the ultimate objective to use minimum financial resources to obtain or acquire a reasonable amount of serials that would satisfy the information and research needs of the user / institution.

On this note the following approaches are worthy of consideration as basis for selection of serial titles for any type of library with the desire for a long-term subscription deal.

1. The amount of information retrieved for readers concerning a published item in a given journal.
2. Citation frequency analysis for evaluating the importance of the journal using e.g. Science Citation Index (using statistical data).
3. User surveys.
4. Subject relevance, usage, availability, accessibility, cost

and format.

5. Publishers reputation/ frequency.
6. Sample copies or inter-library loan system analysis.
7. Determine the primary value of periodical using statistical data.
8. Trail subscription, consultation with experts, librarians or by recommendation.
9. Number of articles published in an issue.
10. General, technical, scientific or inter-disciplinary serial.
11. Language of the publication.
12. Editorial direction.
13. Whether it is international in scope.
14. Reviews of titles.

The above - mentioned points are not sacrosanct. For instance, sample copies of new titles are not fool proof, however they serve as a fair guide in the absence of any other efficient or reliable method. Statistical analysis may also have its draw-backs<sup>14</sup> has the following prescriptions as guide to a good journal:

1. Materials - quality of paper, machine/binding.
2. Text - legibility, layout, suitable typography.
3. Graphics - how appropriate for the particular types of information
4. Navigation - how easy is it for the reader to move about text, from paragraph to caption to text and vice-versa.

## MARKETING AND EXPLOITATION

Marketing and exploitation of serials must be a reality. It is vital for the growth, maintenance and dissemination of information, and bringing the world closer through the print communication media. Marketing, as Elizabeth Esteve-Coll<sup>15</sup> points out quoting the Institute of Marketing is "the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements and profitability". Simple though as this philosophy appears to be, the variables have deep thoughts for analysis.

## IDENTIFYING CUSTOMER REQUIREMENTS

Generally speaking identification of user requirements call for closer look at the following points:

- a. the intellectual, recreational and information needs of actual and potential users and the community the library is supposed to serve or cater for;
- b. the current economic, social, political and scientific programmes of the community and projections for the future;
- c. current research programmes in progress; and
- d. analysis of user types

## ANTICIPATION OF USER NEEDS / RESEARCH

In response to changing needs and character of the users of the community, it behooves of serial managers to research into various aspects of the

trade to ascertain the needs and expectations of the users by serving them with questionnaires, observing their habits and sampling them by interview method. This line of action could lead to creation or drawing up profiles, examination of the social, demographic, and cultural characteristics of a given geographical area.<sup>16</sup> Research into serials could open up avenues that would probably indicate that is a vital and necessary economic activity, a better platform for exchange of ideas, views and reliable vehicle for progress.

## SATISFYING CUSTOMER REQUIREMENTS

This question invites serials managers and publishers, agents and distributors, writers and all departments of the trade to pull resources to give the customer the best of service by satisfying the following conditions in general terms.

1. ensuring regular supply of serials;
2. adequate / high profile articles;
3. availability, accessibility, and reliability;
4. quality control;
5. efficient distribution system and methods of promotion;
6. development towards improved serial production; and
7. have a particular target group in mind.

These perspectives have to be fashioned in a more practical way by ensuring that some or all of the following steps are operational in order to give the marketing aspect of serials a

solid foundation for profitability and continuity.

1. indexing and abstracting service(s);
2. association to promote serial publication and use;
3. an Editorial Board;
4. exhibitions and fairs;
5. subscription agents;
6. donor agencies;
7. conferences, seminars and symposia to be organized;
8. guarantee price levels; and
9. to be produced in conformity with set standards

Exploitation of serial publications takes many forms and varies from institution to institution. The following are some of the method of application:

1. through user education;
2. circulating content pages to users on a selected basis;
3. on full on-line searching facilities;
4. assisting users;
5. through SDI system;
6. to lend both bound and unbound serials;
7. photocopying;
8. current awareness service;
9. display / exhibition; and
10. through exchange programmes of inter-library loan system

Marketing and exploitation of serials are essential for survival of the principles, purposes and all that serials seek to do and promote. In the process, international standards for serial publication have been established. Librarians have recognized the need to monitor the economics of serial publication as well as problems associated with

storage, management, retrieval and use. The UK Serial Group of the Library Association has much interest in serial management, marketing, distribution and use. Because of the high cost of periodical subscription and problems of distribution, availability and accessibility, donor agencies come to the aid of institutions and libraries. The UK Serial Group in promoting serial management with respect to all other matters organize conferences, seminars, workshops for librarians and students. Other professionals in the book trade and industry are occasionally invited to address some of the meetings to share ideas and experiences with them. All these activities are aimed at marketing, exploitation, management and use of serials.

## CONCLUSION

It is an indisputable fact that serials play a prominent role in the promotion of intellectual and recreational activities of people with varied interest, education background or academic pursuit, irrespective of age, language, or occupation. Its production, management, distribution and marketing has become the bone of contention in modern librarianship, owing to problems associated with its acquisition, accessibility, availability, storage and effective use. The prominence of serials in the print communication media has brought into existence Associations like UK Serial Group of the Library Association, specialist courses in serial management, ISSN/EAN and subscription agents. Serials as a resource material of library is becoming a major treasured commodity. Institutions of research,

schools and individuals in one way or the other cherish the role of serials of one kind or the other in their lives because of the relative freshness of information they publish, the frequency and flexibility of its format.

REFERENCES

1. EVANS, G. Edward. *Developing an information centre collections*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Littleto Coloration: Libraries Unlimited, 1987. p. 5.
2. MAYES, Paul *Periodicals administration in libraries: a collection essays*. London: Clive Bingley, 1978. p.7
3. *ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA* 15<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago:Encyclopedia Britannica. 1974. Vol. 26. P.483
4. *Ibid.* p. 484
5. *Ibid.* p. 484
6. GOMERSALL, A. The end of periodicals we know it. *Serials*. Vol. 4. No. 3. November, 1991. P.13
7. *Ibid.* p. 17
8. DAVINSON, Donald *The periodical collection*. rev. and enl. ed. London: Andre Deutch, 1978. P.5.
9. MARLE, Gerard Van. The Netherlands, land of serials. *Serials*. Vol. 4, no.1. March, 1991. P.23
10. DAVINSON, D *op. cit*
11. GOMERSALL, A *op. cit.*
12. DAVINSON, D *op. cit*
13. EVANS, G. Edward *op. cit*
14. MEADOWS, Jack What makes a journal. *Serials*.vol 4, no 1, March, 1991. P.14
15. ESTEVE-COLL, Elizabeth Marketing and academic library. *Information and Library Management*. Vol.5 (3) 19985, p.3
16. *Ibid.*